
AIDING AID:

A monitoring & evaluation framework to enhance international aid effectiveness

Doctoral Dissertation
by Paul Crawford
2004

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of candidate:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paul Ward Crawford', with a stylized, cursive script.

Paul Ward Crawford

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It is difficult to pinpoint the start of an intellectual journey. For me, the journey presented in this thesis may have begun on a day in 1994 while seated in a looted and bullet-pocked office in Kigali, Rwanda. With me were Peter Truscott, the person who first recruited me as an aid worker and Barry Chapman, my boss and mentor at the time. We were planning a project to rehabilitate war-damaged schools in northeastern Rwanda, and Peter introduced me to a tool called ‘logical framework analysis’ (or the ‘logframe’). For an eager, but ill-equipped programmes officer, this tool shed a shaft of light onto an area within which I had been fumbling in the dark for some time.

While I have since come to appreciate much of the critique of the logframe and to recognise that its apparent simplicity belies a deeper complexity, this meeting marked an important intellectual milestone in my professional development. I recognised that the effectiveness of the projects for which I was responsible, could in part, be improved through more rigorous planning, and better use of information.

In numerous other field assignments since that day I have continued to grapple with how we can ‘do aid better’. In this quest, I have appreciated the support and guidance of many people. I will attempt to acknowledge them, while recognising that any list will be inadequate.

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Aiding Aid

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¹ The editing of this document was in accordance with UTS Graduate School Policy.

² Omphaloskepsis \ahm-fuh-loh-SKEP-sis\ (noun): contemplation of one's navel as an aid to meditation.

Aiding Aid

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
LIST OF FIGURES.....	IX
LIST OF RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS.....	XI
ABSTRACT	XII
1 INTRODUCTION	2
1.1 BACKGROUND	2
1.2 HIERARCHY OF ASSUMPTIONS	4
1.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTION	7
1.4 AID RESEARCHER / ACTION WORKER	10
1.5 INTELLECTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	15
1.6 TRANSDISCIPLINARITY	19
1.7 TERMINOLOGY, LAYOUT AND STRUCTURE OF THIS DISSERTATION	24
2 AN AID WORKER IN RESEARCH.....	28
2.1 INTRODUCTION	28
2.2 SELECTION OF AN AR METHODOLOGY.....	28
2.3 SOFT SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY.....	30
2.3.1 The notion of 'soft'	30
2.3.2 The notion of 'systems'	33
2.3.3 The notion of 'methodology'	36
2.3.4 Implementation of SSM	37
2.4 APPLICATION OF SOFT SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY IN THIS THESIS.....	46
2.5 CONCLUSION.....	65
3 AN INTELLECTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	69
3.1 INTRODUCTION	69
3.2 THE NGO DILEMMA	70
3.2.1 The Business Imperative	71
3.2.2 The Ethical Imperative	75
3.2.3 The NGO Dilemma	77
3.2.4 Implications for this Research	78
3.3 M&E—THE RHETORIC & THE REALITY	81
3.3.1 M&E Definition	82

Aiding Aid

3.3.2	M&E Function	88
3.3.3	The Issue of M&E Perspective	98
3.4	INFORMATION SYSTEMS	102
3.5	ORGANISATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS	112
3.5.1	Organisational Performance Measurement.....	113
3.5.2	Organisational Learning.....	127
3.6	PROJECT MANAGEMENT	134
3.7	CONCLUSION.....	142
4	AN ACTION RESEARCHER IN AID	148
4.1	INTRODUCTION	148
4.2	IDENTIFICATION	151
4.2.1	Responsibility for M&E Planning	151
4.2.2	Definition of M&E Detail.....	154
4.3	DATA CAPTURE.....	170
4.4	ANALYSIS.....	173
4.5	DISSEMINATION	175
4.6	UTILISATION	181
4.7	ASSESSMENT	184
4.8	CONCLUSION.....	186
5	A MEIS FRAMEWORK.....	190
5.1	INTRODUCTION	190
5.2	RESOLVING THE ‘WHO’	192
5.2.1	Questioning the Role of ‘M&E Officer’.....	199
5.2.2	Questioning Participatory M&E	202
5.3	RESOLVING THE ‘WHY’	208
5.4	RESOLVING THE ‘WHAT’	215
5.4.1	The Data Identification Framework	217
5.4.2	‘M’, ‘E’ and ‘M&E’	220
5.4.3	Evaluation Data.....	223
5.4.4	Monitoring Data.....	236
5.5	RESOLVING THE ‘HOW’	244
5.5.1	Alignment	245
5.5.2	Practicability	254
5.5.3	Systems Thinking.....	265
5.6	CONCLUSION.....	272
6	CONCLUSION.....	276
6.1	SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTS	276
6.2	THE KEY CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS WORK	281
6.3	IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY & PRACTICE.....	285
6.4	FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS	289
7	REFERENCES	293
8	APPENDIX A.....	I

Aiding Aid

List of Acronyms & AbbreviationsI

9 APPENDIX B VI

Case-study Overview VI

LIST OF TABLES

• Table 1: Formulation of root definitions (based on Checkland 2001, p 75)	41
• Table 2: Outsider – Insider relations in educational research (Source: Elliot, 1988)	50
• Table 3: A summary of the conventional differentiation between monitoring and evaluation (Crawford 2001)	86
• Table 4: Assumptions that underpin the NGO Dilemma	88
• Table 5: The organisational obligations of the three zones of management	195
• Table 6: The STEEP framework for the identification of risk factors	240
• Table 7: An integration of the 'who', the 'why' and the 'what' of MEIS operationalisation.	244
• Table 8: An example of content in the business rules tables of the 3d-Logframe	253

LIST OF FIGURES

• Figure 1: Increasing clarity with AR cycles (Source: Dick, 1993)	8
• Figure 2: The cycle of AR in human situations (Source: Checkland and Holwell 1998, p 26)	17
• Figure 3: The fields which underpin the intellectual framework for this action research	18
• Figure 4: Rich picture of an 'intellectual field' (source: Checkland and Holwell 1998, p 32)	22
• Figure 5: Transdisciplinarity in this work	23
• Figure 6: Five classes of system proposed by Checkland (Source: 1981, p 112)	35
• Figure 7: The early '7-step' representation of SSM (Source: Checkland, 2001, p 71)	38
• Figure 8: A representation of mature SSM (Source: Checkland 2001, p 72)	39
• Figure 9: The general structure of a conceptual model of a purposeful activity system (Source: Checkland, 2002, p 78)	43
• Figure 10: Action Research spirals (Source: Zuber-Skerritt, 1993)	49
• Figure 11: Rich picture of NGO-administered aid system	52
• Figure 12: SSM Conceptual Model of the Kenyan case study project	54
• Figure 13: Generic SSM Conceptual Model of a logframe-designed aid project	57
• Figure 14: The expanded structure of a SSM model (Source: Checkland 2001, p 79)	60
• Figure 15: A SSM conceptual model enabling individual attention to efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness	62
• Figure 16: SSM conceptual model of a MEIS	64
• Figure 17: The notion of reciprocity in aid as reflected in the "conditions" imposed by donors for accountability (Source: <i>Daily Nation</i> , June 2001)	72
• Figure 18: Relative influence of actors on impact chain elements (Source: Smutylo 2001)	91
• Figure 19: The relative control of change agents on social change processes	91
• Figure 20: The 'ripple effect' metaphor of diffusion of innovation including the linear theory of change anticipated by the 'impact chain' (Source: adapted from Crawford, Perryman et al. 2004)	93
• Figure 21: Project boundary partners (source: Earl 2002, p 42)	97
• Figure 22: Three classes of human actors in the theory of change	98
• Figure 23: (From left to right) a teleological perspective on project M&E; a teleological perspective on organisation-wide performance; a teleonomical perspective on organisational performance;	101
• Figure 24: The links between data, capta, information and knowledge (Source: Checkland & Holwell 1998, p 90)	105
• Figure 25: 'Processes of Organisational Meanings' (POM) model: a model of social processes in which meanings are established and lead to information support for people undertaking purposeful action (Source: Checkland & Holwell 1998, p 106)	109
• Figure 26: A simplistic representation of two stages in the iterative pursuit of organisational effectiveness	112
• Figure 27: A model of the conventional wisdom of 'an organisation' (Source: Checkland & Holwell 1998, p 82)	118
• Figure 28: A richer model of 'an organisation' (Source: Checkland & Holwell 1998, p 83)	118
• Figure 29: A comical perspective on the seeming lack of appreciation for the discipline of project management by aid workers (Source: IFAD 2002)	136
• Figure 30: M&E data cycle	149
• Figure 31: The constraints encountered at each stage of the M&E data cycle	150
• Figure 32: A logframe matrix variant used in the Kenyan case study project	155
• Figure 33: The three-stage theory of change embodied in the Kenyan case study project defined in terms of the actions/responses of three classes of human actor	157
• Figure 34: The dissemination schedule for four reports defined for a programme in Southern Africa	179
• Figure 35: A conceptual framework to identify the 'why' of a MEIS (after Crawford and Bryce 2003)	209
• Figure 36: The relative interest in agency performance of the dominant NGO external stakeholders	212

Aiding Aid

• Figure 37: The relative interest in agency performance of each management zone	212
• Figure 38: The relative interest in performance criteria by each of the three zones of management 217	
• Figure 39: The IF–AND--THEN relationships that underpin the vertical logic of the logframe (based on: AusAID, 2000).....	219
• Figure 40: The conventional view of logframe-defined M&E compared with the view proposed in this thesis.	222
• Figure 41: A logframe modification proposed early in this candidature	222
• Figure 42: 'PACT', the alternative method to Earned Value Analysis for measuring project progress:cost (i.e. efficiency) (Source: Pillai and Rao 1996)	228
• Figure 43: The relationship between 'hypotheses' and the 'assumption classes' within the IF-AND- THEN logic of the logframe.....	238
• Figure 44: The incorporation of the 'STEEP' domains within the assumptions column of a conventional logframe matrix.....	241
• Figure 45: The 'ripple effect' of development innovation diffusion (Crawford, Perryman et al. 2004).....	241
• Figure 46: The frontal perspective of the 3D-Logframe showing the 'Project Planner's View'..	246
• Figure 47: The rear perspective (180°) of the 3D-Logframe showing the assumptions and the 'Project Manager's View'.	246
• Figure 48: One-to-many relationships in the vertical logic of the logframe (Source: adapted from AusAID 2000).	247
• Figure 49: The under-side of the 3D-Logframe showing the business rules tables defined for each layer in the vertical logic.	250
• Figure 50: One-to-many relationships within the structure of an INGO	261
• Figure 51: A SSM conception of the aid process (from Figure 8).....	267
• Figure 52: The EU PCM cycle	269

LIST OF RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

- Crawford, P., Perryman, J. & Petocz, P. (2004) Synthetic Indicators: a method for evaluating aid project effectiveness, *Evaluation*, 10 (2): 29 – 46
- Crawford, P. & Bryce, P. (2003) Project monitoring and evaluation: a method for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of aid project implementation, *International Journal of Project Management*, 21 (5): 363 – 373
- Crawford, P. (2002) The aid project cycle: an effective vehicle towards ESD? *Conference of Australian and New Zealand Society for Ecological Economists*, Sydney, December 2002
- Crawford, P. (2001). *M&E Handbook: Guidelines for the monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian projects implemented by Oxfam Angola*. Luanda, Angola, Oxfam GB. (unpublished)

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to provide a coherent theoretical framework to guide the development of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) information systems within international aid agencies. The thesis applies soft systems methodologies (SSM) to explore the research question and to develop conceptual models.

The theoretical basis for the M&E framework proposed is drawn from a transdisciplinary review of three academic fields: information systems, organisational effectiveness and project management. It is argued that inadequacies in the operationalisation of M&E systems arise from divergent epistemological and ontological assumptions about the nature of information and its role within organisations that are concerned with effecting social change. The M&E framework proposed seeks to resolve the dilemma posed by these divergent assumptions. This involves a M&E information system (i.e. MEIS) that is novel in terms of its scope, purpose and application.

Firstly, the *scope* of the proposed MEIS takes in the entire aid organisation, going beyond the dominant, conventional approach, which is project-centric. This enables alignment of project strategies with organisational mission. Further, it aims to promote the institutionalisation of lessons learned within projects (conceived as ‘social experiments’) for organisational learning, thereby enabling informed debate about the effectiveness of the organisation in fostering sustainable development.

Secondly, the *purpose* of the proposed MEIS has been defined as being concerned with promoting organisational success. The critical success factors of learning and accountability are identified, and the role of M&E in encouraging responsive management decision-making and critical inquiry and reflection is described.

Thirdly, the *application* of the proposed MEIS involves a modified logframe. The ‘3D-Logframe’ serves as a conceptual basis to address limitations found

Aiding Aid

with the conventional two-dimensional logframe matrix when employed for M&E purposes.

The proposed M&E framework was developed out of iterations of action in the field and reflection. Further research will involve applying the framework in its entirety.